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Our 70th cover in February 1997.

SPECIAL FEATURE

Common Ground celebrates 25 February's 6

HEALTHY DEMOCRACY

The heart of democracy is accountability 5
Maher Arar

HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

Organic Rules! GMO fools set to dilute standards ... 12
Paul Anthony Taylor

Electric car con again 15
Joseph Roberts

HEALTHY PEOPLE

Love and biology 7
John Pickrell, Lucy Middleton, Alun Anderson

Chronic disease management: Drug shareholders' goldmine 9
Alan Cassels

Conscious health: Detoxifying and healing 11
Ron Garner

Forever young and old too soon 32
Geoff Olson

HEALTHY SPIRIT

Baby steps toward a better world 33
Sonya Weir

CULTURE

Same planet, different worlds 20
TWENTY SOMETHING *Ishi Dinim*

Five ring circus story of an addicted city 21
FILMS WORTH WATCHING *Robert Alstead*

ENVIRONMENT

Have fun with sustainability 16
EARTHFUTURE *Guy Dauncey*

Has PM Harper gone green? 17
SCIENCE MATTERS *David Suzuki*

HEALTH

Healthy food, healthy planet 10
NUTRISPEAK *Vesanto Melina*

SPIRITUALITY

Feel your body from within 18
POWER OF NOW *Eckhart Tolle*

Exploring inner space 19
UNIVERSE WITHIN *Gwen Randall-Young*

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR 20

RESOURCE DIRECTORY 25

DATEBOOK 22

CLASSIFIED 23

ON TRACK ZODIAC 34

TLC The Land Conservancy BRITISH COLUMBIA'S "NATIONAL TRUST" Canada
CHFA Canadian Health Food Association Voice of the Natural Products Industry
H.A.N.S.
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ethics in action awards

The heart of democracy is accountability

A message from Maher Arar

INSPIRATION

It was [more than] four years ago that the horrible ordeal I suffered first began. People ask me repeatedly how, during this time, I have been able to cope with the stress of surviving torture, the stress of not being able to find a job, the stress endured at the inquiry, and the stress from the countless hours I spend doing media interviews and talking to my lawyers on the phone. The answers are simple: I draw my strength from my faith; from my loving, caring, strong wife; and from the support and generosity I have received from Canadians. I have rediscovered Canada through its people, people who made me feel proud of being Canadian.

What has also given me the determination to persevere is the obligation I have felt as a human being to keep my case alive in hope that the attention will help other innocent people. Three years ago, I made a very difficult decision to tell my painful, personal story to the Canadian public. I made it clear at that time that I wanted to achieve three objectives.

The most important and first objective was to clear my name.

Justice Dennis O'Connor did so in his report from the commission of inquiry examining my case when he stated that he was "able to say categorically that there is no evidence to indicate that Mr. Arar has committed any offence or that his activities constitute a threat to the security of Canada."

Accountability is not about seeking revenge; it is about making our institutions better and a model for the rest of the world. Accountability goes to the heart of our democracy. It is a fundamental pillar that distinguishes our society from police states.

My second objective was to hold those people responsible to account.

The Canadian government has full access to both the public and confidential reports prepared by Justice O'Connor. Since the release of the report the Canadian public has consistently asked the government to take concrete actions to hold those Canadian officials responsible to account.

It is important to highlight that the inquiry report does not point the finger at any one person or institution alone. It is also crucial to focus on demanding concrete changes rather than focusing on asking some officials to resign from their jobs. This is because accountability is not about seeking revenge; it is about making our institutions better and a model for the rest of the world. Accountability goes to the heart of our democracy. It is a fundamental pillar that distinguishes our society from police states.

My third objective was to make sure that this does not happen to any other Canadian.

Unfortunately this has already happened to three other Canadian citizens: Abdullah Almalki, Ahmad El-Maati and Muayyed Nureddin. The similarities between their cases and mine are striking. We were all detained at the same branch of the Syrian military intelligence, tortured by the same people and asked questions that would be of interest to Canadian police and security agencies. It is my hope that the government acts on its promise and holds an independent review of their cases, as recommended by Justice O'Connor in his report.

If the government wants to prevent another tragedy from happening, it must fully implement Justice O'Connor's comprehensive and balanced recommendations.

In my opinion these recommendations, if implemented fully, will protect our national security and safeguard our hard-won civil liberties. We have heard encouraging statements from Public Safety Minister Stockwell Day, indicating he intends to implement the recommendations. It is my hope that he will act immediately. *continued on p. 34*

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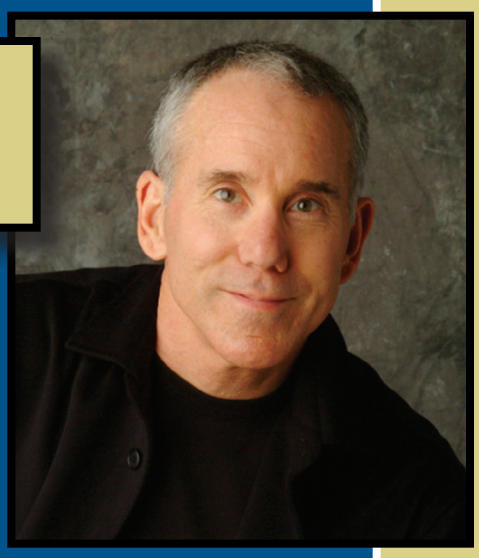

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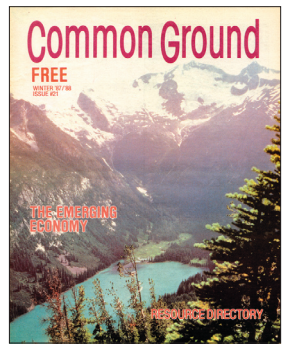

WINTER 1987/'88

25 inspiring years of Common Ground

by Joseph Roberts

Prior to 1982 people needed more access to information that was inspiring, independent and life affirming. Mainstream media of the time represented commercial interests even more than today. No large independent newspapers or magazines existed to inspire people in the spirit of the times.

Many of us who grew up during the 1960s and '70s had questioned authority and now wanted more out of life than the prescribed regimen.

The civil rights movement and Vietnam war protests had been successful. People were awakening to just causes and experiencing their personal and collective power when engaged in honourable actions. These grassroots movements morphed to renew the personal growth, peace, anti-nuclear and environmental movements.

Each of these new flowerings of human spirit branched into a dazzling variety of volunteer causes seeking a deeper realization of self and a fuller actualization of social justice. The peace movement matured and sought inward answers to outward problems. The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, War Resistors League, Ban the Bomb and other peace groups were being discovered by a new generation with enthusiasm for the causes. John Lennon and other socially conscious musicians inspired our imagination to give peace a chance. Many groups like Voice of Women, Society Promoting Environmental Conservation, Greenpeace, Canadian Coalition for Nuclear Responsibility and West Coast Environmental Law Association sprouted.

Music and dance were alive and well. The arts flourished. Grassroots groups were growing. Direct action coupled with public education focused attention to effect positive change.

Much personal and social progress came from this gathering together. Meditation groups grew. Community gardens sprang up. People became informed, got organized and effectively averted disastrous projects such as open pit uranium mining near Clearwater, BC, the dumping of 2,4-D into the Okanagan's Lake Kalamata, and Atomic Energy of Canada asking BC Hydro to go nuclear. Saving wilderness and wildlife came into popular culture. Ecology and conservation won over short-sighted agendas.

In 1976 at the Habitat Forum, thousands heard the compassionate and passionate words of Mother Teresa, Buckminster Fuller, Margaret Mead and Barbara Ward encouraging us to understand that we are global citizens who need to be kind to each other and wisely shepherd our beautiful world.

I was swept up into the vibrant grassroots movement opposing atomic energy and bombs in BC during the '70s, because an elderly woman with white hair and a big smile asked me to sign a Canadian Coalition for Nuclear Responsibili

In 1976 at the Habitat Forum, thousands heard the compassionate and passionate words of Mother Teresa, Buckminster Fuller, Margaret Mead and Barbara Ward encouraging us to be kind to each other and wisely shepherd our beautiful world.

WINTER 1988/'89

WINTER 1989/'90

WINTER 1990/'91

WINTER 1991/'92

WINTER 1992/'93

JAN/FEB 1994

Love and biology

by John Pickrell, Lucy Middleton and Alun Anderson

The word love appears in many contexts. There's maternal love, familial love, romantic love, sexual love, a wider love for fellow humans and religious love for God, to name but a few. Some cultures have 10 or more words for different forms of love and poets and songwriters always find myriad aspects of love to celebrate.

The science of love is still in its infancy. Yet scientists are beginning to get early insights into the nature and origin of love. We can now look inside human brains to view changing patterns of activity and biochemical changes that take place during love, explore diverse human experiences of love, study how we select mates and woo lovers and look for the evolutionary roots of love.

Addicted to love

So what exactly is going on during the rollercoaster of euphoria and despair that is falling in love?

In the brain, romantic love shows similarities to going mildly insane or suffering from obsessive compulsive disorder. Studies show that when you first fall in love, serotonin levels plummet and the brain's reward centres are flooded with dopamine. This gives a high similar to an addictive drug, creating powerful links in our minds between pleasure and the object of our affection, meaning that we crave the hit of our beloved again and again.

Lust is driven by sex hormones, such as testosterone, which can go offkilter too. As can levels of the stress hormone cortisol and the amphetamine-like chemical phenylethlamine, which increases excitement. Other hormones, oxytocin and vasopressin, kick in later and appear to be crucial for forming long-term partnerships. Couples who have been together for several years show increased brain activity associated with these chemicals, when they look at pictures of their partner. Oxytocin is produced when couples have sex and touch and kiss and massage each other. The hormone makes us more trusting and helps overcome "social fear" and is important for bonding.

Brain scans of people in love show that the old adage "love is blind" really is true. While the dopamine reward areas are excited in love, regions linked with negative emotions and critical social judgement switch off.

Sexual chemistry

Making the right choice when finding true love is an important business, so how do we go about selecting a mate?

Many factors add up to make us desirable to potential partners. There's the obvious stuff like symmetrical features and good skin, which showcase a healthy development, immune system and good genes. Women look for tall men with masculine faces, kindness, wealth and status. Men prefer young, fertile women with a low waist-to-hip ratio and who are not too tall. Neither sex is very keen on people who wear glasses.

Other factors are less obvious. Research suggests that humans are attracted to partners who resemble themselves and, slightly disconcertingly, their parents too. Smell appears to be important as well; people are often more attracted to the smell of those who have different combinations of some immune system genes to themselves. Mates with dissimilar major histocompatibility complex (MHC) genes produce healthier offspring that are better able to thwart

Brain scans of people in love show that the old adage "love is blind" really is true.

disease. People with similar MHC genes even prefer the same perfumes.

Some species, such as birds and mice, attract their mates with complex songs or showy displays. Intelligence and talent are prized by people too. As are expensive gifts and even cheap love tokens. Even being in a relationship can make you more attractive to potential mates.

Other factors are more random; a woman's attractiveness and pheromones can fluctuate with her hormone levels and menstrual cycle. As a consequence, taking the pill can inhibit a woman's ability to select an appropriate mate. In concert, these many factors mean the path to true love can be somewhat unpredictable. Many people with hectic lifestyles today are turning to the Internet, online lonely hearts, dating websites and speed dating to help them track down a partner.

Love evolution

The various forms of love probably have a common evolutionary beginning, so where are scientists looking? Maternal love seems a good place to start. Biologically, it makes perfect sense. In animals, which help their offspring to survive, the bond is essential to passing the mother's genes on to the next generation. Again, oxytocin may have an important role in the development of a bond between a mother and child. Another hormone, prolactin, may prime both mothers and fathers for parenthood.

Unlike maternal love, monogamous bonds between males and females are pretty rare in mammals. Less than five percent are monogamous and there is no clear pattern to help explain why it occasionally appears. Monogamy, it appears, is mostly for the birds.

It seems that in those rare mammals that do practise it, evolution stole the biochemistry and neural tricks that bond mother to infant and reinstalled them, so as to bind male and female together. One study of prairie voles shows that a species could be turned from promiscuous to devoted with a change in a single gene related to vasopressin.

Whatever romantic love's origins and purpose, long-term relationships are certainly important in keeping us content and happy. Unfortunately, it's not all wine and roses when it comes to love. Ecstasy, euphoria, elation and contentment may be accompanied by jealousy, rage, rejection and hatred.

Falling in love may have evolved because people who focus their attention on a single ideal partner save time and energy, therefore improving their chances of survival and reproduction. Unfortunately, this also means people are predisposed to terrible suffering when jilted by their beloved.

Painful emotions develop when the reward centres of the brain, associated with the dopamine high of falling in love, fail to get their hit. Paradoxically, when we get dumped we tend to love back even harder, as the brain networks and chemicals associated with love increase. First we protest and attempt to win the beloved back.

Panic also kicks in as we feel something akin to the separation anxiety experiences by young mammals abandoned by their mothers.

Then love can turn to anger and hate, as the regions associated with reward are closely linked to rage in the brain. Finally, when jilted lovers are resigned to their fate, they often enter into prolonged periods of depression and despair. While such behaviours may be classed as pathological, and perhaps rare, the truth is that they are closer to home than we dare contemplate; passion's thrills can resemble obsessive-compulsive disorder.

The chances of a relationship succeeding would seem to be difficult to predict, but one study suggests that divorce may be partially genetically predetermined. There are even mathematical formulas for predicting the chances of divorce.

Reprinted from (www.newscientist.com/channel/sex/love/dn9981), September 2006. The article was originally entitled Instant Expert: Love.

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In a recent public TV broadcast, a cancer survivor documented her research as to why cancer affects 1 in 2 Canadians. The conclusion reached pointed overwhelmingly to the myriad of carcinogens in our environment and their alarming accumulation in our bodies.

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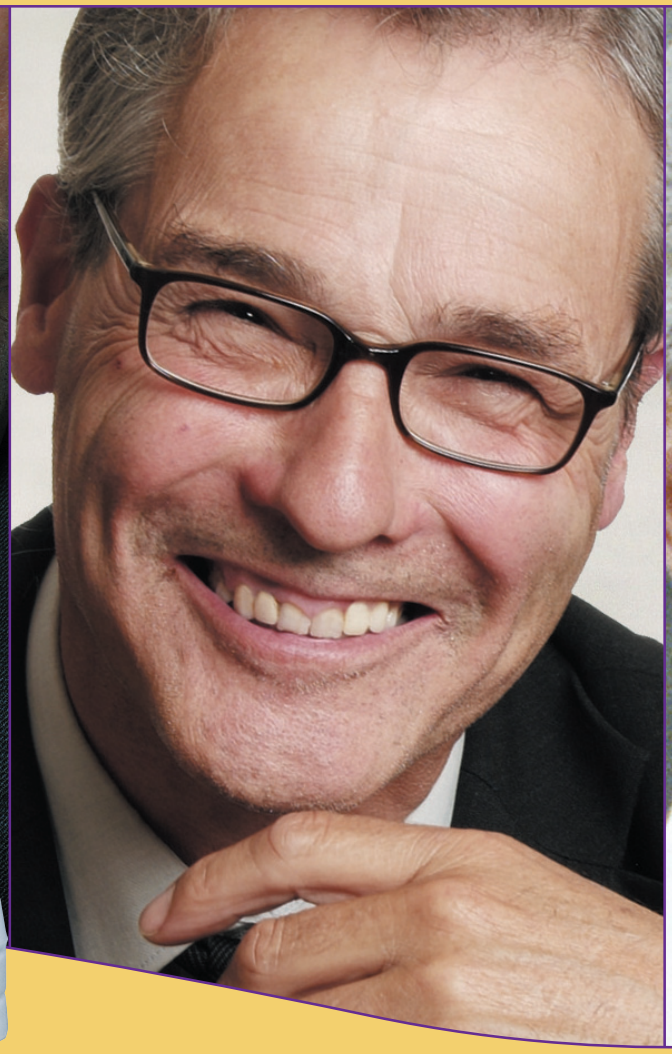

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DRUG BUST *Alan Cassels*

The job description of your average physician keeps getting bigger. If you are sick, you go to the doctor. If you are worried that you might be getting sick, you go to the doctor. If you aren't sick and want assurances how to stay that way, you go to the doctor. In the paradigm of modern medical care we've set up, a doctor is your first, or primary, contact with the system. That's why we call their services "primary care."

One way that medical authorities around the world are trying to improve the world for primary care physicians has been the creation and embrace of chronic disease management (CDM) to help physicians manage patients with long-term, unremitting diseases such as asthma, arthritis and diabetes.

CDM has its champions and detractors, yet curiously, it almost never makes the news. Until recently. In early January, the *Vancouver Sun* seized on some remarks related to CDM, made by former BC deputy minister of health, Dr. Penny Ballem. By most accounts, a hard working, competent and long serving deputy minister, she quit the Campbell government in 2006, citing the BC Liberals inability to set "quality targets" with doctors.

Given that most truth gets disfigured when chewed on by media hounds, and this story is likely no exception, what caught my attention was the following quote attributed to her: "Only about 40 percent of diabetics in BC were getting good care." This is described as "guideline-based optimal care," a practice where physicians systematically monitored and managed the care of their diabetic patients. Calling the situation in BC "atrocious," with media-grabbing candor rarely seen displayed by health bureaucrats, Ballem said that such inattentive care was responsible for "killing people."

What's really going on? The range of services that physicians are asked to provide their diabetic patients includes checking the level of sugar in the blood, the level of protein in the urine (to see how well your kidneys function) and eye function (elevated blood sugar damages the retinal blood vessels). If only about 40 percent of docs in BC routinely do these tests for their diabetic patients, is this really a bad thing?

Canadian diabetes guidelines beat a pretty steady drum, encouraging our doctors to carry out intensive testing and monitoring of their patients' blood sugar, and then encouraging them to help the patients monitor themselves (a practice called SMBG or self-monitoring of blood glucose).

If you wonder how big an issue SMBG is, you should know that blood glucose strips, which diabetics use as many as eight times a day cost about a buck each. In fact, they are the fastest growing item in Pharmacare's formulary; in Canada we spend more than $300 million per year on blood test strips. Ninety percent of those strips are for type-2 diabetics. (Remember from my January column that type-2 diabetes is a "disease" largely, but not completely, controllable by diet and exercise and most people require social, not medical, interventions to prevent their diabetes from killing them.)

Despite the steady drum pumping out the SMBG paradigm, some researchers say that all this blood-checking activity actually does very little to improve patients' health outcomes. Testing your blood this frequently is like trying to lose weight by stepping on the bathroom scale eight times a day. Such testing could even lead diabetics in the opposite direction, where they would end up taking prescribed drugs that could be harmful or of marginal efficacy, and otherwise turning them into worry warts, obsessing about their blood sugar that naturally fluctuates throughout the day, anyway.

A recent presentation by an Alberta researcher captured the inanity of aggressive SMBG as part of a debate in which he argued: "Frequent glucose monitoring is a waste of time in the vast majority of people with type-2 diabetes." In this debate, he blew the lid off most arguments made for getting people to test and retest their blood sugars. Citing the Cochrane database of systematic reviews, 2006 (www.cochrane.org), he said that there is "… no valid randomized trial evidence that SMBG reduces either the number or severity of symptomatic episodes of hypoglycemia (or hyperglycemia)."

To add to this severe indictment of SMBG, he points out that getting people to test and retest their blood sugars did not improve peoples' quality of life, and was expensive and even potentially harmful in that it increases patients' rates of depression, stress and worry.

What is happening here?

While the psychological impact of diabetes mongering is surely the subject of a future column, suffice to say I smell a rat in the whole move towards the "disease management" approach, not because the guidelines may be promoting stuff that isn't based on evidence, but because those guidelines tend to see patients and their body parts in isolation. The person in the doctor's office becomes a glucose level or a blood pressure reading or a set of peak flows – primary care by numbers.

We've seen other examples where so-called "evidence-based" practice guidelines for chronic disease – hypertension, Alzheimer's disease, etc – become corrupted, shaped by committees stacked with experts whose dependence on Pharma largesse is de rigueur, as long as it's "declared."

continued on p. 24

If you follow the money, you'll find that those who are gunning for profits – drug, device and insulin manufacturers – will have their own people at the table to ensure the guidelines reflect a treatment paradigm that leads to maximal, instead of rational, consumption of their products.

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NUTRISPEAK *Vesanto Melina MS, RD*

HEALTH

In the January issue of *Common Ground*, this column addressed the report released late in 2006 by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (www.fao.org/), stating that cattle in the meat and dairy industries generate more global warming greenhouse gases than can be blamed on transportation and use of vehicles.

Here, we continue with a recent study by Italian and Swiss environmentalists that compares meat-based and plant-based diets – all nutritionally adequate and equivalent in calories and protein – with regard to their impact on our planet's resources. These scientists found that the typical vegetarian diet used significantly less energy and land and water resources and was far more sustainable than a typical meat-based diet. Vegan diets that include no eggs or dairy products prove to be still less damaging and further benefits are realized by choosing organic foods.

Though the otherwise excellent documentary An *Inconvenient Truth* failed to spell out the immense effects of our dietary choices on global warming, fortunately, the related website (see references below) gives several helpful tips, including the following:

- Buy locally grown and produced foods. You'll reduce use of fuel while supporting local agriculture. Local farmers' markets reduce by one fifth the amount of energy required to grow and transport food.
- Buy fresh foods instead of frozen. Frozen food uses 10 times more energy to produce.
- Buy organic. Organic soils capture and store carbon dioxide at much higher levels than soils from conventional farms. If we North Americans grew all of our corn and soybeans organically, we'd remove more than 580 billion pounds of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.
- Avoid heavily packaged products. Reduce your garbage and you'll reduce carbon dioxide production.
- Eat less meat. (Better still, eliminate it entirely.) Methane is the second most significant greenhouse gas and cows are one of the greatest methane emitters. Their grassy diet and multiple stomachs cause them to produce methane, which they exhale with every breath.

Part three of this article will appear in next month's *Common Ground*.

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1) *Livestock's Long Shadow – Environmental Issues and Options*: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Steinfeld at al, 2006. (www.virtualcentre.org/en/library/key_pub/longshad/A0701E00.pdf).

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3) *An Inconvenient Truth:* (www.climatecrisis.net/takeaction/whatyoucando/index4.html).

Vesanto Melina is a registered dietitian and consultant who lives in Langley, BC. She is co-author of seven food and nutrition classics, including Becoming Vegetarian, Becoming Vegan *and* Raising Vegetarian Children. *(www.nutrispeak.com) (vesanto@nutrispeak.com) 604-882-6782.*

Black bean soup

Black beans, a staple in Mexico and throughout Central and South America, form the basis of wonderful salads, stews and soups. Vegetable stock, which provides flavour, can be made from either stock cubes or powder or purchased ready-made. Use a little less liquid to create a fine stew. Lime juice, added just before serving, gives a bright note in this recipe, developed by the excellent Vancouver chef Joseph Forest, and featured in *Becoming Vegetarian* (Melina and Davis, Wiley Canada).

1 cup (250 ml) diced carrot
1 cup (250 ml) diced celery
1 onion, diced
1 clove garlic, minced
1 tbsp (15 ml) olive oil
3 cups (750 ml) cooked black turtle beans or black beans
4 cups (1 L) vegetable stock
¼ cup (60 ml) tomato paste
1-1/2 tsp (7 ml) ground cumin
1 tsp (5 ml) dried oregano
1 tsp (5 ml) dried thyme
2 tsp (10 ml) lime juice
Salt and pepper to taste

In a large pot, sauté carrot, celery, onion and garlic in oil over medium heat for five minutes. Stir in beans, stock, tomato paste, cumin, oregano and thyme. Cover and simmer for 20 minutes or until vegetables are cooked. Just before serving, stir in lime juice. Add salt and pepper and adjust the seasoning. Makes 6 cups (4 servings).

Per 1-1/2 cup serving: calories: 256; protein: 13 g; fat 4 g; dietary fibre: 10 g; calcium: 131 mg; iron: 6 mg; magnesium: 90 mg; zinc: 1.4 mg; folate: 140 mcg.

Conscious health
Detoxifying and healing

by Ron Garner

When practices that lead to disease are discontinued, in order to move toward health the body starts by correcting and removing disease conditions. This is called the "reversal process." A condition that built up must be broken down. Conditions that have been treated with drugs or antibiotics, for instance, have been put on hold; a complete natural healing has not taken place, and only the symptom has been removed. Disease conditions must be re-entered and reversed for damage to be undone.

The body follows a clear pattern in the process of healing itself. The most serious and recent disease conditions are given first attention. As progress is made, the body works backwards in time, so to speak, retracing and correcting other conditions in reverse order to when they appeared. Remember that this is all conditional on the body continuing to receive regular nutrition and rest, over and above that which is required to carry on daily activities, so it doesn't have to borrow from its own nutrient reserves to accomplish the process.

Healing crises

A healing reversal is also a healing crisis. It is a turning point in the course of a disease, a period of intense but necessary housecleaning as the body prepares to heal.

The body cannot accomplish the tasks of serious detoxification and healing and still be able to provide energy for everyday activities. Rest is required. That is why we feel we have less energy during a cold or flu. These are times of intense internal cleansing. The body doesn't have less energy; it is redirecting the energy it does have for healing purposes.

We may continue to experience periods of illness and low energy. However, during a healing crisis, there is one very large difference: Under the influence of a healthy lifestyle, the body experiences symptoms related to a disease healing crisis, as opposed to a disease survival crisis. At the completion of such a crisis, the body will have gained vitality, instead of losing it. The body is getting stronger, not weaker. The healthier we become, the less intense the healing crises will be. This is logical, since the amount of toxins to be eliminated from the body is decreasing, while the organs and tissues are getting stronger.

As the physical body is cleansed, it will also bring emotional crises to the surface for correction. Old feelings of inferiority, sadness, depression, anger and emotional conflicts can manifest. These also need to be eliminated, because in one way or another they are connected to the development of a disease. We need to be patient and work through these periods.

A healing reversal is also a healing crisis. It is a turning point in the course of a disease, a period of intense but necessary housecleaning as the body prepares to heal.

A healing crisis usually lasts between three and seven days. However, if there is adequate healing energy available, the body may run several healing crises consecutively. One should try not to interfere with the process by taking medication to ease pain or discomfort. If this is done, it will slow down and even stop the natural, corrective process. Likewise, it is not wise to stimulate the body to cleanse or focus healing on a part that has not been selected as a priority at any given time. If this is done, the body is forced to refocus and expend energy and nutrients dealing with the medication. It has to change priority. We must work with the body, not against it. Let your body dictate what, and when, things will be worked on. It knows best.

The body will not begin a healing crisis until it has stored enough energy and nutrients to carry out the healing process it intends. The stronger the body is, and the more vitality it has, the greater or more intense a healing crisis can be. A very ill body with low vitality will tend to have less intense and shorter healing crises at first. The body knows what it is capable of handling. However, it attempts to detoxify whenever it has the opportunity.

Ron Garner is the author of Conscious Health *and a health researcher, educator and speaker. He lives in White Rock, BC. Meet Ron at the upcoming Wellness Show at Vancouver's Trade and Convention Centre, March 2-4, where he will sign books at both the* Common Ground *and Ocean Retreat Centre booths.*

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GENUINE HEALTH

Organic rules, GMO fools

by Paul Anthony Taylor

Organically grown foods have been receiving increased negative attention from Codex in recent years and are under threat. The Codex committee on food labelling is attempting to water down global organic standards to permit the use of unnatural substances: Sulphur dioxide causes allergic reactions in some people. Sodium nitrite and sodium nitrate are potentially carcinogenic and implicated in hyperactivity in children. Carrageenan is associated with the formation of ulcers in the intestines and cancerous tumours in the gut.

Worse still, the Codex Alimentarius Commission recently gave the go-ahead for work to begin on the inclusion of ethylene in the Codex guidelines for the production, processing, labelling and marketing of organically produced foods. Ethylene is used to artificially induce fruits and vegetables to ripen; its approval for use on organic foods would represent a disturbing step towards WTO-enforced acceptance of the same dubious and unnatural agricultural practices that non-organic foods are already subject to.

Codex wants to water down organic standards because organic foods fetch higher prices than ordinary, non-organic foods and the large, non-organic food producers see an easy opportunity to break into the profitable, quickly expanding market for organic foods. On a deeper level, organic foods promote better health than non-organic foods, by virtue of the fact that they contain higher levels of micronutrients. In addition, of course, organic foods don't contain pesticides, residues of veterinary drugs or genetically modified organisms.

Bearing in mind that good health is not in the interests of the "business with disease," this ultimately makes the increasing demand for organic foods a threat to the pharmaceutical and chemical industries, not only because organic foods promote good health, but also because they result in a lower demand for pesticides, veterinary drugs and GM foods and, thus, in lower profits.

Moreover, unlike genetically modified seeds, organic seeds cannot be patented. Given that some of the major players in the pharmaceutical and chemical industry, such as Bayer and BASF, are also major players in the biotech industry, the rising popularity of non-patentable organic foods is, in fact, a serious and growing threat to their profits.

Codex is not just about nutritional supplements; it is the primary political battlefield where the war is being waged about who will regulate and control the global food supply from farm to fork. An increasingly tangled web of global authorities, big business and financial interests is waging this war. Trade and profit are its prime goals, not human health.

Genetically modified foods

The Codex Alimentarius Commission adopted its first guidelines and principles for genetically modified (GM) foods in 2003. US, Canada and Argentina won a trade dispute at the WTO against the European Union (EU), where it was argued that the EU had been applying a moratorium on the approval and importation of foods containing GM material.

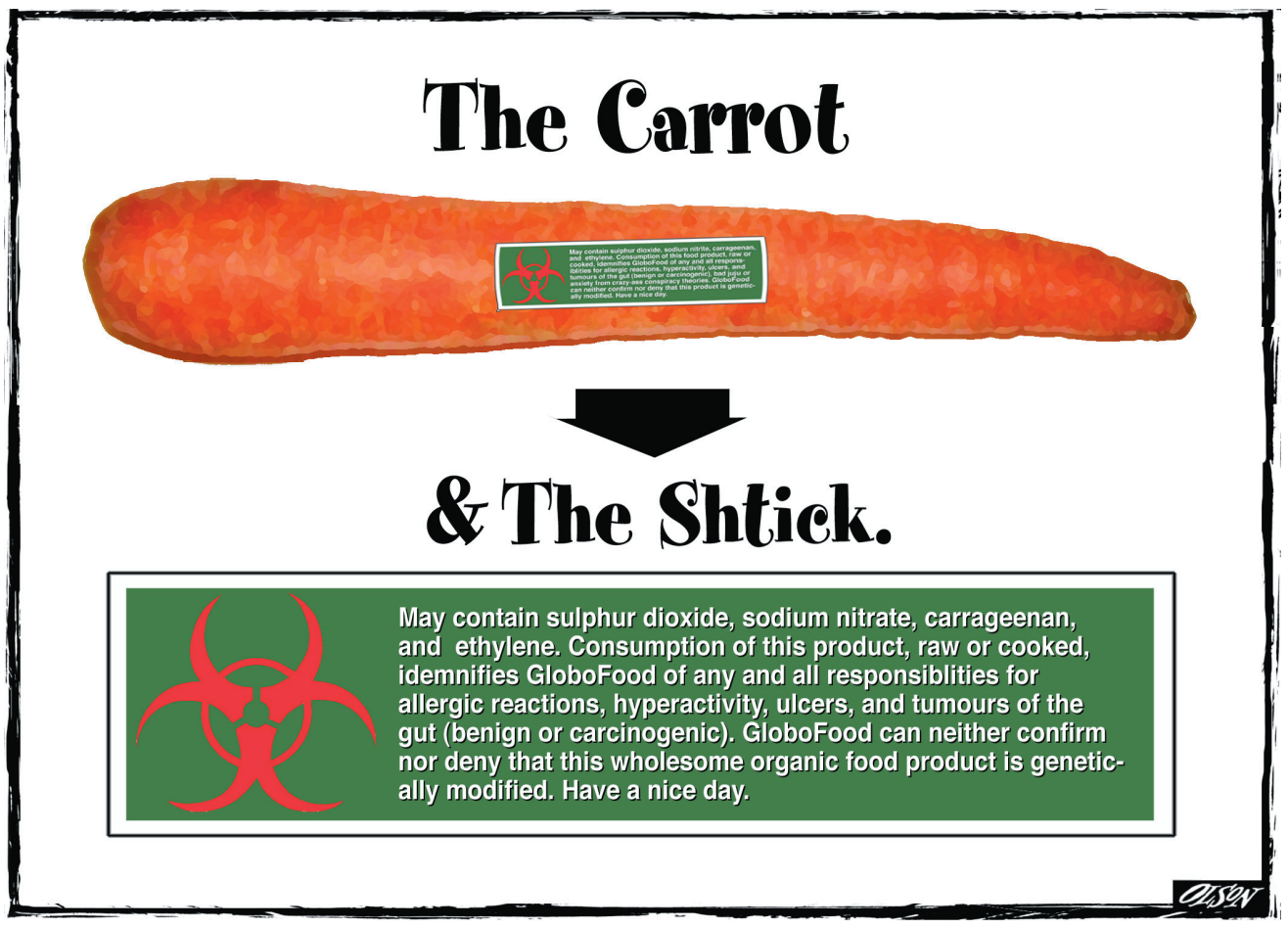
If adopted, further guidelines and standards for transgenic foods now in the process of being drafted by Codex, will further contribute to making the approval and importation of GM foods that comply with them mandatory for all WTO member countries. The US, Canada and Argentina are also pushing against mandatory product labelling for GM foods. This is exactly what the big GM food manufacturers want, of course, as they have long realized that growing numbers of people are opposed to transgenic food products and that industry will not be able to change public opinion about these products any time soon.

Unlike the seeds for regular foods, seeds for GM foods can be patented. This is the real key to why biotech companies are so desperate for these foods to be forced onto world markets, as the potential long-term profits are so colossal as to compare favourably with the market in pharmaceutical drugs. Given that some of the major players in the pharmaceutical industry, such as Bayer and BASF, are also major players in the biotech industry, it is evident that the pharmaceutical industry is once again positioning itself as a key beneficiary at Codex.

So far as the pharmaceutical industry is concerned, the only products worth producing are those that are patentable. Because of their rise in popularity, food supplements, natural health practices and even organic food represent a serious threat to the pharmaceutical industry. The financial interest groups behind the Codex Alimentarius Commission know this only too well and are now engaged in a desperate struggle to maintain their monopoly upon the healthcare industry and expand into GM food production.

Food labelling

A specific Codex committee to deal with food labelling issues, the Codex committee on food labelling (CCFL), has been in existence since 1965. The issue of food labelling is particularly crucial to the further spreading of life-saving natural health information, as restrictions upon the written content of food labels contribute, along with those on advertising, to preventing nutritional supplement manufacturers from informing people of the proven benefits of dietary supplementation. CCFL has refused to acknowledge the role of optimum nutrition in the prevention, alleviation, treatment and cure of disease, and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OLSON

rather than protecting the health of consumers, can be seen to be acting in the interests of the pharmaceutical industry.

Codex is not just about nutritional supplements; it is the primary political battlefield where the war is being waged about who will regulate and control the global food supply from farm to fork. A tangled web of global authorities, big business and financial interests, is waging this war. Trade and profit are its prime goals, not human health.

The long-term financial winners in the battle to gain control over the world's food supply are likely to be the pharmaceutical and chemical industries, especially given that the adoption of still further Codex guidelines for foods derived from biotechnology now seems almost inevitable. As a result, our freedom of choice, our future health and the environment itself are all now clearly at risk.

Good nutrition and optimum health threaten the pharmaceutical industry's disease business because they reduce the size of the marketplace for synthetic drugs. However, food that is free of pesticide residues, artificial additives and other contaminants can, by definition, only come about as a result of a lower global usage, or ideally the entire elimination, of these chemicals. This, of course, would not be in the financial interests of the pharmaceutical and chemical companies that manufacture such substances, as it would clearly result in lower profits, better health for entire populations and a consequent reduction in the use of synthetic drugs.

While it may have been out of the limelight recently, the Codex Alimentarius Commission's support for business with disease has continued unabated, and the wide scope of its activities makes it a significant danger to the future health of all humanity.

Do we want to see a world where our access to safe, nutritious foods and effective dietary supplements is restricted and controlled by pharmaceutical and chemical interests? If not, then we must act now, before it's too late. Visit (www.freedomincanadianhealthcare.com) for more information.

Adapted from Codex: What Is It and How Does It Affect You and Your Health? *by Paul Anthony Taylor, published at (www.freedomincanadianhealthcare.com), a national grassroots organization dedicated to preserving Canadians' right to natural nutrition and therapies. Taylor became interested in natural health after falling ill with myalgic encephalomyelitis in 1991. He made a full recovery with the use of high-dose nutritional supplements. For more than a decade, he has campaigned against the global initiative to restrict consumer access to safe and effective health-promoting substances.*

He lives in the UK. Email (paul.taylor@dr-rath-foundation.org).

So you think you're free to choose?

Codex is not an easy subject to understand. With over 20 committees meeting on an annual basis, and published reports comprising more than 1,400 pages in 2005 alone, most people are blissfully unaware of the extent to which its activities affect their health.

The Codex Alimentarius Commission (Codex) is the main global body that makes proposals to, and is consulted by, the directors-general of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) on all matters pertaining to the implementation of their joint FAO/WHO food standards program.

Established in 1963, the commission's main purposes are stated in its procedural manual as being: protecting the health of consumers; ensuring fair practices in the food trade; and promoting the coordination of all food standards work undertaken by international governmental and non-governmental organizations.

Unfortunately, its activities do not protect the health of consumers and the international food trade is anything but fair. At time of writing, the commission presided over a total of 27 active subsidiary committees and ad hoc intergovernmental task forces, the main functions of which revolve around the drafting of standards, guidelines and other related texts for foods, including food supplements. Once completed, these texts are presented to the commission for final approval and adoption as new global standards.

In addition to dealing with ordinary foods, Codex also sets standards and guidelines for vitamin and mineral food supplements, health claims, organic foods, genetically modified foods, food labelling, advertising, food additives and pesticide residues. In all of these areas, the evidence is now inescapable that Codex is increasingly putting economic interests, particularly those of the pharmaceutical and chemical industries, before human health.

Canada Organic standard at long last

With an eye to both lucrative exports to the European Union, and to increasing domestic consumption of non-chemically produced food, the Canadian Organic Growers association is celebrating the federal government's decision to establish on December 22, 2006, at the last minute – a national organic standard.

Without an official government "Canada organic" designation before January 2007 and a listing in the *Canada Gazette* (http://canadagazette.gc.ca/partII/index-e.html), domestic organic growers would have lost their European export markets because of an EU labeling requirement deadline at the end of 2006.

"We hope that the new government oversight will help to protect the integrity of the organic brand," said Canadian Organic Grower's executive director, Laura Telford PhD. Under the new regulation, only products grown and processed in compliance with the standards developed by growers working with government will be allowed to carry the new Canada organic label.

For Canadian organic growers, a goal which is even more worthy than keeping Canadian organic product moving internationally, is to build domestic awareness of the environmental, social and health benefits of eating organically. Currently, more than 80 percent of the organic food consumed by Canadians is imported.

"We hope that the new Canada organic label will help Canadians more easily identify Canadian product. This in turn will bring more Canadian producers and processors on board, something our industry sorely needs, particularly in certain parts of the country where we cannot keep up with demand," said Dr. Telford.

For more information on organic agriculture, visit the Canadian Organic Growers' website at (www.cog.ca).

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A TV reporter at the recent Detroit auto show, announcing the latest vehicle models, stated that car manufacturers are building what people want to buy. This is a self-fulfilling prophecy because we can only buy what they build.

No wonder Ford and GM are in financial trouble. Are they really listening to consumer demand or are they using their huge PR machinery to perpetuate petroleum profits. Hello. Companies like Toyota will soon have racked up sales of half a million fuel-saving gasoline hybrids.

This self-assured announcer went on to say that while people talk about energy-efficient and gasoline hybrid cars, what they really want are powerful, fuel-guzzling vehicles. This just does not figure with my reality. I am still waiting for someone to build an electric car that I can afford and actually buy. The Tesla electric sports car, while as fast as a Lamborghini, costs more than $100,000 (www.teslamotors.com). Tesla plans to market a less expensive electric sedan in two years.

Since watching the documentary *Who Killed the Electric Car?* it is easier to spot the media shills doing PR for big car manufacturers. The EV1 (Electric Vehicle One) was brilliantly designed by a special project team at General Motors. People happily bought the EV1, or thought they had bought it. In California, the zero emission vehicle (ZEV) program required that two percent of new vehicles produced for sale in 1998 and 10 percent of new vehicles produced for sale in 2003 would be zero emission. A modest goal to support if you care about our planet.

So GM built a masterpiece, created by a truly inspired team of engineers. People eager to drive pollution free vehicles snatched the car up. The level of consumer acceptance for the EV1 surprised GM. But rather than make a commitment to continue to produce the car, a consortium of US industry representatives – automobile manufacturing, insurance, financial and oil – sued the government of California to withdraw its anti-pollution law, which required zero emissions on a small percentage of new cars sold.

After quashing the laws, GM did something else that startled consumers who "owned" EV1s. GM recalled all the EV1s stating that the cars were leased, not sold, and that anyone refusing to return the EV-1 could be sued. The electric vehicles were confiscated even under protest by owners. One group of owners offered GM more than $1 million if they could just keep their beloved EV-1s. Offer rejected.

Brand new and almost new electric cars were hauled off and destroyed. Car corporations and their friends first crushed the law, and then they crushed the cars. But they could not crush peoples desire for ecologically sound vehicles.

What the myopic TV announcer failed to see is the real perpetrator responsible for impeding the production of electric vehicles. When that news cynic droned that new car buyers are really just lusting after the biggest V-8 petroleum powered autos available, you know, the ones America already has to sell you, he was playing the Detroit climate change deniers blues.

I want an electric vehicle and I want it now! I want a car that does not pollute the air children breathe. Clean air is important. I want a vehicle that does not contribute to global warming and recharged from sustainable energy sources such as hydroelectric. I want peace rather than more bloody wars for oil. I want to drive knowing my car supports life on our planet instead of killing its people and environment. If some dumbass TV reporter thinks his cynicisms help the dialogue, he is dead wrong.

People do care and we want vehicles that heal rather than hurt our world. You could call it the PV1, the Peace Vehicle One. Imagine all the people who would buy. You may say I am a dreamer, but I know I am not the only one.

For information watch the film Who Killed the Electric Car? *and contact you local electric car group. Editor's note: In most places outside BC, electrical energy to power cars is still made from dirty sources such as coal, but electric cars use the dirty energy more efficiently. Moreover, electric cars owners also support clean renewable energy from solar, wind, tidal, hydro and geothermal power.*

How Often Do You Hear Yourself Saying
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I've Been Meaning To!"

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Their minds are a hodge-podge of half baked ideas and "I've been meaning toos". They think of a thousand "schemes" to make money quickly—but DO nothing about them. Thoughts flash in and out of their brain with the speed of lightning. New ideas rush in crowding out old ones before they have taken form, shape or completion.

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Their mind is like a powerful automobile running wild—destroying their hopes and dreams, their POSSIBILITIES! They wonder why they don't get ahead and never get anything done. They cannot understand why others, with less ability, pass them in the prosperity parade. They pity themselves, excuse themselves, and sympathize with themselves. The great tragedy is that they have every quality that leads to success--intelligence, originality, imagination, ambition and completion! Their trouble is that they don't know how to USE their brain properly.

Their mental make-up needs an OVERHAULING...

There are millions like them—failures, half successes—slaves to those with BALANCED, ORDERED MINDS. It is a known fact that most of us use only one-tenth of our brainpower. The other nine-tenths are dissipated into thousands of fragmentary thoughts, daydreaming, wishing. We are only paid for ONE-TENTH of what we possess because that is all we USE. We also accomplish things with the same ONE-TENTH.

We are hundred horse-power motors delivering only ONE-TENTH of the total horse power we possess!! The reason most people fall miserably below what they dream of attaining in life is that certain mental faculties in them BECOME ABSOLUTELY HALF-STARVED THROUGH DISUSE and "Non-Supporting Thoughts," just as a muscle often does. If, for instance, you lay for a year in bed, you would sink to the ground when you arose; your leg muscles, UNUSED FOR SO LONG, they could not support you.

You Possess Everything You Need In Your Mind!

It is no different with those rare mental faculties, which you envy others for possessing. You actually DO possess them, but they are ALMOST HALF-STARVED, like unused muscles, simply because they are faculties you seldom, if ever, USE. Be honest with yourself. You know in your heart that you can have more, be more, and attain more if you just begin to do the things you know you need to get down now!

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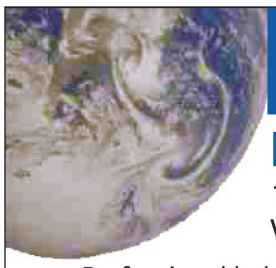

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Have fun with sustainability

EARTHFUTURE *Guy Dauncey*

It's a serious business, living. And all these environmental woes can really spoil a good day. How's an earnest activist to keep cheerful when everything seems to be such a mess?

My advice comes in two parts. The first is serious and deep, so I'll keep it brief. It's this: We are just beginners. As a species on this planet, we're like rambunctious two-year-olds who have just discovered the delights of running, talking, grabbing and eating, and who are determined to have things their way.

Dear, patient Mama Earth is trying her hardest to teach us to put things back where they belong, to clean up our mess, to learn to share, to not take things that aren't ours, to not hit people and to say sorry when we hurt somebody. Like most two-year-olds, however, we don't want to listen. If our oil happens to be in someone else's country, we'll send in the Tonka trucks and grab it.

No matter how bad things look, there's no excuse for being constantly angry, cynical or miserable.

So, alas, we're heading towards a mighty confrontation with Mama and we're about to learn that in the forthcoming battle of wills, tantrums won't get us far. It behoves us, therefore, to think beyond the two-year-old stage to the wonderful childhood that a calm, cooperative relationship with Mother Earth and Father Sky might promise.

Wouldn't it be good? Golden playdays where we can develop our intelligence and work with the miracles of Mother Nature, instead of trying to impose our will upon her. We have all sorts of miracles in store once we learn to clean up our mess and cooperate.

My second piece of advice is to remember the fifth law of sustainability. Physicist and ecologist Barry Commoner formulated four laws: (1) Everything is connected to everything else; (2) Everything must go somewhere; (3) Nature knows best; and (4) There's no such thing as a free lunch. The fifth law, formulated by yours truly, says, "If it's not fun, it's not sustainable."

This is not just whimsy. It is an expression of the fundamental joy that all beings take in living, when they're not being beaten up by a selfish two-year-old. You don't have to scratch far for a human to come alive when fun enters the picture. I'm pretty sure the parrots, elephants and chimpanzees also have fun when they're feeling relaxed and free.

Having fun is also motivating. People want to come out of a meeting feeling better, not worse. No matter how bad things look, there's no excuse for being constantly angry, cynical or miserable. So while you're busy changing the world, remember to hug, tease, laugh, dance and sing.

In that spirit of fun, here are some treasures from the web. So take an hour, get yourself a good cup of tea and settle down with your computer.

For openers, go to (video.google.ca) and type in the *Galaxy Song* for a modern remix of the Monty Python classic.

Next, go to (www.littleanimation4kids.com) and play around until you find Rosie's songs and the *Little Earth Character* for kids, sung by Rosie Emery who lives in Victoria. Children need to have fun, too.

It's the adults' turn now. Go to the Vegetarian Society's (www.rudefood.org). They're veggies, so they must be good, right?

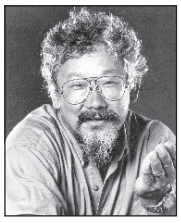
The Wombat offers more good learning for the adults in Earth's kindergarten, very similar to Rosie's. Go to (www.globalcommunity.org), click on multi-media and then on *The Wombat*.

Now for the big one: Robert Newman's *History of Oil* is a London comic's take on history, oil, warfare and Iraq. It's 45 minutes in length, but well worth the time. Go to (video.google.ca) and type in History of Oil.

Next go to (www.youtube.com), type in "asylum + ribbon" and watch *Stick Magnetic Ribbons on Your SUV* (version most viewed), paying good heed to the words. It is priceless.

Finally, go to (video.google.ca) and type "bliss + juggling" for the *Amazing Juggling Finale*. Paul McCartney sings, with good understanding of the fifth law: "And in the end, the love you take is equal to the love you make."

Guy Dauncey is president of the BC Sustainable Energy Association, and co-author with Liz Armstrong and Anne Wordsworth of Cancer: 101 Solutions to a Preventable Epidemic, *New Society Publishers, May 2007. Visit (www.earthfuture.com)*



Has PM Harper gone green?

SCIENCE MATTERS *David Suzuki*

ENVIRONMENT

Well, it took Stephen Harper a while, but he finally put Rona Ambrose out of her misery, shuffling her out of the limelight of the environment ministry and replacing her with the smiling face of John Baird.

Some have argued that the move is long overdue; Ambrose was often faulted for her poor performance on the environment file. Of course, poor performance, in this context, doesn't mean insufficiently protecting the environment. It means she was unable to assuage the concern held by the public, the opposition and the media that Stephen Harper's government is completely uninterested, even hostile, towards the environment.

Indeed, Ambrose may not have been the best spokesperson, often coming across as somewhat cold and prickly on a file that is considered more warm and fuzzy. Baird, on the other hand, is outgoing and well liked. He's also influential and politically savvy. Within a couple of hours of the announcement of his appointment, he telephoned me to say that he was committed to working with environment groups because climate change was a serious problem that, if anything, was being underestimated by scientists.

John Baird could be a card-carrying member of Greenpeace and he still wouldn't be able to change a thing without Harper's blessings.

He also assured me that he was "… not a member of the flat-Earth society." I don't know if he was comparing himself to his predecessor, the rest of the Conservative cabinet, the prime minister or just making an offhand joke, but the comment is an important one.

That's because whether or not Ambrose cared a whit about the environment was irrelevant, as will be the case with Baird. The reality is that government policy under the Harper administration is dictated by one person: Stephen Harper. John Baird could be a card-carrying member of Greenpeace and he still wouldn't be able to change a thing without Harper's blessings.

So, is Harper changing his stripes? It certainly didn't hurt that former prime minister Brian Mulroney recently made public statements urging Harper to go green. As Mulroney pointed out, it helped him to do so back in 1988 when he embraced the rising tide of environmentalism. In fact, Mulroney was recently hailed as Canada's greenest prime minister.

Of course, Mulroney may not have had a green bone in his body. He was ultimately responding to public concern. Harper is now in that same position, though he seems reluctant to admit it. Public concern over environmental problems, especially global warming, has reached an all-time high. It would be politically foolish to ignore those concerns.

Yet Harper has done a remarkable job of ignoring them, thus far, in his stint as prime minister. For a long time, it seemed that he hadn't realized that he actually won the last election, appearing content to simply blast the Liberals' environment record as though he were still in opposition. However, behind the scenes, there was no doubt about who was in charge, as Harper abandoned Canada's Kyoto commitment and systematically dismantled all the environmental projects and policies the previous government had developed.

In their place, Harper left promissory notes for a comprehensive "made in Canada" solution to Canada's growing environmental woes. Eventually, that laughable language was purged and replaced with the equally disingenuous "Clean Air Act." When Ambrose was savaged by the international community at a UN-sponsored climate meeting about the obvious weaknesses and insufficiencies of the act and her government's abandonment of Kyoto, she simply reverted to bashing the Liberals.

It's been a rocky ride for Harper's government on the environment file. Given his history on the issue, the most likely scenario is that Harper will do the bare minimum – only what he must – to quell rising public concerns about the environment. What that bare minimum is will be determined by the Canadian public, who will decide if he's green enough or really just another member of the flat-Earth society.

Join the Nature Challenge and learn more at (www.davidsuzuki.com).

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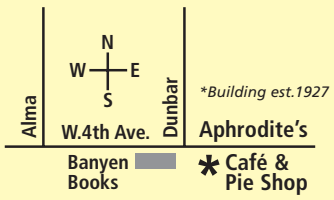

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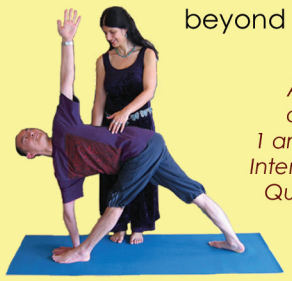

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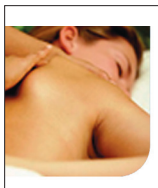

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THE POWER OF NOW *Eckhart Tolle*

SPRITUALITY

You can't think about presence and the mind can't understand it. Understanding presence is being present. Try a little experiment. Close your eyes and say to yourself: "I wonder what my next thought is going to be." Then become very alert and wait for the next thought. Be like a cat watching a mouse hole. What thought is going to come out of the mouse hole? Try it now.

As long as you are in a state of intense presence, you are free of thought. You are still, yet highly alert. The instant your conscious attention sinks below a certain level, thought rushes in. The mental noise returns; the stillness is lost. You are back in time.

To stay present in everyday life, it helps to be deeply rooted within yourself. Otherwise, the mind, which has incredible momentum, will drag you along like a wild river.

To test their degree of presence, some Zen masters have been known to creep up on their students from behind and suddenly hit them with a stick. Quite a shock! If the student had been fully present and in a state of alertness, and if he had "… kept his loin girded and his lamp burning," – one of the analogies that Jesus uses for presence – he would have noticed the master coming up from behind and either stopped him or stepped aside.

But if he was hit, it would mean he was immersed in thought, which is to say absent, unconscious.

To stay present in everyday life, it helps to be deeply rooted within yourself. Otherwise, the mind, which has incredible momentum, will drag you along like a wild river.

Rooted within yourself means to inhabit your body fully, to always have some of your attention in the inner energy field of your body. To feel the body from within, so to speak. Body awareness keeps you present. It anchors you in the Now.

In a sense, the state of presence could be compared to waiting. Jesus used the analogy of waiting in some of his parables. This is not the usual bored or restless kind of waiting that is a denial of the present. It is not a waiting in which your attention is focused on some point in the future and the present is perceived as an undesirable obstacle that prevents you from having what you want.

There is a qualitatively different kind of waiting, one that requires your total alertness. Something could happen at any moment and if you are not absolutely awake, absolutely still, you will miss it. This is the kind of waiting Jesus talks about.

In that state, all your attention is in the Now. There is none left for daydreaming, thinking, remembering, anticipating. There is no tension in it, no fear, just alert presence. You are present with your whole Being, with every cell of your body. In that state, the "you" that has a past and a future – the personality, if you like – is hardly there anymore. And yet nothing of value is lost. You are still essentially yourself. In fact, you are more fully yourself than you ever were before, or rather it is only now that you are truly yourself.

"Be like a servant waiting for the return of the master," says Jesus. The servant does not know at which hour the master is going to come. So he stays awake, alert, poised, still, lest he miss the master's arrival. In another parable, Jesus speaks of the five careless (unconscious) women who do not have enough oil (consciousness) to keep their lamps burning (stay present) and so miss the bridegroom (the Now) and don't get to the wedding feast (enlightenment). These five stand in contrast to the five wise women who do have enough oil (they stay conscious).

Even the men who wrote the Gospels did not understand the meaning of these parables, so the first misinterpretations and distortions crept in as they were written down. With subsequent erroneous interpretations, the real meaning was completely lost. These are parables not about the end of the world, but about the end of psychological time. They point to the transcendence of the egoic mind and the possibility of living in an entirely new state of consciousness.

Adapted from The Power of Now, *copyright 1999 by Eckhart Tolle. Reprinted with permission of New World Library, Novato, CA, 800-972-6657 (ext. 52).*

Exploring inner space

UNIVERSE WITHIN *Gwen Randall-Young*

The dream is the small hidden door in the deepest and most intimate sanctum of the soul, which opens to that primeval cosmic night that was soul long before there was conscious ego, and will be soul far beyond what a conscious ego could ever reach. – Carl Jung

The experience that is our life occurs in the context of a huge macrocosm composed of endless space, filled with numberless universes, upon the little blue dot we call home. The experience itself, however, occurs completely within our own vast, endless inner universe.

This inner universe is created through our senses, perceptions and beliefs. It occurs within the conscious mind, which is fuelled by the external world, and by the world of our unconscious, our dream world, our imaginings and the archetypes of our species.

Our inner universe is unique to us. While it may share common elements with others, it is a one-of-a-kind event that is continually evolving, creating and recreating itself with every stimulus, both internal and external.

Exploring that world can be mystifying, enlightening and often spiritual, but it can also be very lonely. There is only one inhabitant in that world. Perhaps that is why some find self-exploration or meditation uncomfortable. Television, computers, work or a busy social life can save one from stepping off the edge into that unfamiliar abyss.

We cannot really avoid it completely, however. It is always there in the background of our consciousness while we are busy thinking the external world is the most real part of our experience. The external is where ego hangs out, and for ego, that is centre stage. It is all there is.

To experience our soul we must go within. Once inner space becomes familiar, it ceases to feel strange and becomes instead like a nurturing womb. Instead of feeling disconnected, we discover a connectedness that transcends anything ego has known. As we immerse ourselves in inner space, any sense of separateness disappears.

As we go deeper, we discover a kind of portal that connects our inner space to all that is, to the vastness of the eternal. It then seems curious that we had the illusion of separation. The reason for the confusion is this: imagine drawing a circle on a page. The line forming the circle is all that separates the inside from the rest of what is there. Remove the line and it all becomes one. In our case it is ego which forms the line between inner and outer. Ego is at the interface and allows us to connect with the outside world. Ego does have some useful functions; it is not bad, just limiting.

However, when we identify with ego that separation seems real. When we transcend ego, everything changes. There is no more in here/out there. We are no longer interested in polarity or taking sides. We still function in the world, but we no longer take things personally. We become more interested in understanding, in seeing the big picture.

As we go deeper, we discover a kind of portal that connects our inner space to all that is, to the vastness of the eternal.

More often, we find ourselves functioning as an observer, noticing what is happening, but viewing it from a perspective of wisdom. We no longer feel a need to take sides or to be right. We are more likely to mediate or facilitate instead. Our focus is more on finding solutions and honouring all who are involved.

We also release our need to control things. We may still have desires and goals, but we recognize that we are co-creating with the universe, so anything may happen. Whatever does happen is undoubtedly for our highest good, although ego often might argue with that. We develop the ability to know when to take action, and when to simply surrender and flow. We do not worry because we trust the process of life.

Since we no longer take things personally and are not as attached to outcomes as we once were, all of our relationships and dealings with others seem easier and more effortless. It is not that everything suddenly magically flows; it is just that now we know how to flow. Ego may still try to get us agitated, but we are now aligned with soul, and soul just wants to enjoy the journey.

Gwen Randall-Young is an award-winning author and psychotherapist in private practice. For information about other articles, CDs or her book, Growing Into Soul: The Next Step in Human Evolution, *visit (www.gwen.ca). See display ad this issue.*

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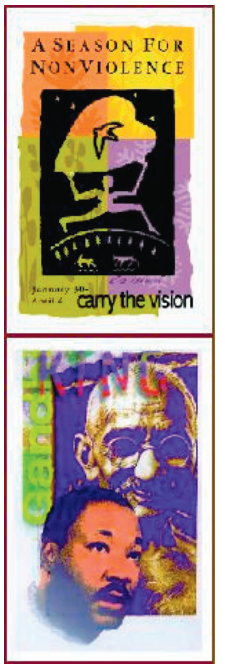

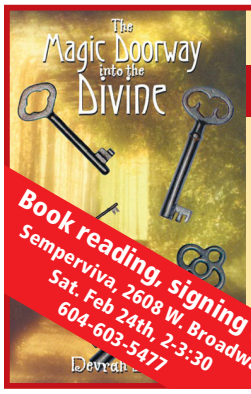

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Same planet, different worlds

TWENTY SOMETHING *Ishi Dinim*

CULTURE

I smiled upon our landing, not only because it was a safe one, but also for the fact that I was processed in a visa line labelled *others*. I am an *other* driving through this foreign night to a hotel. There are men at the front door with black boots and shotguns, because other people might want what I have. I wish I could just give it to them willingly, but it doesn't really work like that.

Desperation is palpable here in Kampala, Uganda. The faces that stare out from packed vans, as our separate vehicles come to rest for a moment, tell a common story of hardship that I have never *really* been able to perceive. We are close enough to reach out to one another and touch; still, we're worlds apart. A woman shovels handfuls of dirt from a hole in the road into a plastic bag. On a pole above her is an advertisement for a fancy, new cell phone that she will never own.

Being here as a voyeur isn't my only point of contact with the people of Africa. I am meeting many different people, trying to listen and cherish every moment. My understanding of the familiar tragedies and joys of these brothers and sisters is forming, but in order to appreciate it I have to really taste and feel their experiences.

It is so easy back home to get caught up in self-gratification that I forget about what it is we have been given and what it is to give. Today, while driving to shoot an interview, our driver Isaac talked with such pride about his three children; two of them came to him when his brother and sister-in-law passed away from AIDS.

The best thing that ever happened to me was being born into privilege, in Canada. It came to me so easily, so effortlessly. The only relative experience I have to compare with the disparity of wealth that exists in these countries is in Vancouver, going from the touristy-shopper Water Street to addiction-ravaged Hastings Street.

In Nairobi, Kenya, when travelling the same distance from the crammed Kibera slum to manicured polo fields and mansions, the contrast in affluence has been multiplied by an infinitely higher factor. Why is it so hard to give that to everyone else? And if that were even possible, would it be good for the planet?

People are not senseless. There is nothing that seems *right* about the discrepancy of people's conditions in our world. Then why does that fissure remain the status quo? Throwing money at problems to deal with them is one way, but ultimately not empowering. A sense of accomplishment and ownership are key factors, I believe. We all want to improve, whatever world we come from.

Our common Mother Earth connects us all in no uncertain way. Life has richness here in Africa, just like everywhere else; it is up to us not to cheapen it. What are we going to do about it? Humanity as a whole could thrive if only we shared the load and the benefits of carrying it.

Must-see films:
Children of Men, Mountain Patrol
Links:
www.SalamaShield.org
www.peopleandplanet.net/doc.php?id=2217

Ishi graduated from Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design in 2001, with a BFA major in photography. He makes films, collects cacti and ponders many things. Currently he is trying to figure out what to do with the rest his life. (contactishi@yahoo.ca).

Letters

Is Alcan pirating provincial rivers through BC Hydro?

Many people, although not nearly enough, are very concerned about the energy plan for the province that is being implemented by the Campbell government.

Our rivers are being stolen from us and are being given to multinational corporations.

Alcan is leading the way in this. Alcan, BC Hydro and the Ministry of Energy plan to appeal the ruling of the BC Utility Commission, which turned down Campbell's attempt to do a secret deal, which would have given Alcan control of the Nechako River and a profit of at least $200 million annually, in perpetuity, it would seem.

Hydro power water licences have been distributed all over the province. They are destined to give their private investors billions of dollars from the utility bills we all pay. These are monies, some of which BC Hydro previously contributed to the general revenue of the province, to be used for education, welfare, health, etc.

The people of this province are mostly unaware of this outrage being perpetrated by their elected government, which supposedly acts on their behalf. But George Orwell's *Animal Farm* alerts us that Campbell has two mantras: "Corporations Good – People Bad" and "Private Corporations Good – Public Corporations Bad."

Alcan is a preferred, private, multinational corporation, while BC Hydro, which Campbell has already ruined, belongs to the public. To learn more, visit (hydrofactsbc.ca) and then talk to your friends and prepare for public protests.

Dr. Hamish Nichol, Pemberton

A publication of substance

I am a 78 year old woman who subscribes to a variety of socially conscious organizations: (Canada) *Council of Canadians, Earthsaver, Canadian Wildlife Association*, and I attend a metaphysical church (*Religious Science*). Also my yoga philosophy focusses on "soul growth."

In my experience your magazine has always fed into my needs in one aspect or another. I consider it to be a publication of substance. I have read each article in sequence – no "cherrypicking" – with equal interest and satisfaction.

May you continue to maintain your excellent standards, attracting such erudite contributing writers, for the next quarter century at least!

Thank you.

Myrtle Mustoe, West Vancouver

A few issues worth discussing, Mr. Premier

Welcome to 2007, Mr. Premier. I realize that you felt that there was really nothing to meet about last fall, but I was hoping that you might think that there are a few issues worth discussing this year. But maybe I'm just dreaming. I know your sights are firmly fixed on 2010. Too bad about the BC Stadium roof, but I guess that's what happens when too much hot air just isn't strong enough to hold up anything of substance.

There are a few things I'd like to bring to your attention, if you figure there's not much to meet about. There's the small matter of increased homelessness throughout the province. Then there's the annoying and odiferous matter of Victoria flushing its poop into the ocean. There's also a fair amount of heart medication and other geriatric prescription fallout that ends up in the sea, due to the direct flushing of untreated urine.

Mr. Premier, if this doesn't grab your attention, there's the statement you made in China last year when, on your taxpayer-funded trip, you assuaged the fears of some Asian businessmen, assuring them there would be some real movement on the oil front in the waters off Haida Gwaii. Let's hope that movement isn't an earthquake, eh Gord!

Steve O'Neill from the Flying Shingle *on Gabriola Island*

Five ring circus story of an addicted city

FILMS WORTH WATCHING *Robert Alstead*

It's always interesting to see how filmmakers portray the city you live in. For the Douglas Coupland-penned *Everything's Gone Green* – currently in limbo after the Toronto-based distributor ThinkFilms was taken over by a US company – Vancouver is all shiny surfaces and superficial fakery. In contrast, the documentary *Fix: The Story of an Addicted City* and Nathaniel Geary's dark drama *On the Corner* hone in on the running sore that is Vancouver's Downtown East Side.

Mount Pleasant, an ensemble drama set around the Vancouver neighbourhood of the title, has elements of all the aforementioned films, but cleverly weaves together the interconnected lives of people at all levels of the Vancouver social strata, from the most affluent and privileged, to the addict and sex-trade worker, to offer a view of the city that will resonate with many viewers.

The Mount Pleasant depicted here is, to borrow real estate salesmen parlance, an "up-and-coming" neighbourhood. New home owners struggle to maintain a safe environment for their kids, which means trawling the sandbox in the public park for syringes and going on vigilante patrols to move prostitutes out of their neighbourhood.

While both serious and tragic, the subject matter is leavened with occasional moments of humour and on-the-nose character observations. In the wrong hands, the story by writer-director Ross Weber, who previously won best newcomer award at VIFF 2000 for *No More Monkeys Jumpin' on the Bed,* could have easily come off as cliché. The quality of the acting, however, ensures one is engrossed throughout. Essentially a character piece, it provides the strong Canadian cast with an opportunity to show us what they've got.

Katie Boland gives a highly sympathetic performance of an impressionable, middle-class teenager dragged into addiction and the sex trade. Tygh Runyan fits the bill as her junkie boyfriend, mercurial and unstable. Ben Ratner gives a simmering performance, with occasional fireworks, as an over-protective dad, and Kelly Rowan is superb as the condescending, controlling mother, who is painfully blind to problems at home while trying to fix the community at large.

Ultimately, the film falls short of the intense denouement that it seems to promise throughout, but this is an engaging slice of Vancouver life. See it before it leaves the cinema.

Two independent documentaries, which premiere at the end of this month, also have a strong Vancouver focus. *Five Ring Circus* presents an alternative view of the 2010 Olympics to that of the marketing spiel that we've grown accustomed to and *Indecent Exposure to Cars* focuses on the World Naked Bike Ride. Behind both films is Conrad Schmidt, the man who founded the naked ride and someone for whom the word activist seems somehow too small.

Schmidt has also earned renown for founding The Work Less Party, a new political party with the catchy slogan, "Work less, consume less, live more!" In between, he has organized some of the best parties on the East Side, found time to author a book about why we need a 32-hour work week and staged a musical.

Schmidt says that while the 2010 games have been presented as the "Green Olympics" for the people, *Five Ring Circus* cuts through the spin to show "… the environmental destruction, lies, social displacement, and more lies" behind the mega budget event. The film features interviews with the mayors of West Vancouver, North Vancouver, Burnaby and Whistler, and footage from the protests to stop the destruction of the Eagleridge Bluffs during the expansion of the Sea to Sky Highway.

Robert Alstead recently completed You Never Bike Alone*, a feature-length documentary about Vancouver's Critical Mass ride. More information and this month's screenings at* (www.youneverbikealone.com).

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JAN 9
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JAN 10
Waitaha Circle - metaphysical and communication exploration. Explore/present topics of interest to you. Supportive/encouraging atmosphere. Nikkei Centre, Burnaby, 7pm. Info: Call Parin 604-298-4975.

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JAN 17 - FEB 21
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JAN 19-21
Gabriola Island Film Festival - Community Hall. Featured films include Whaledreamers (new from Australia), Bullshit, featuring activist Vandana Shiva, and 360˚, a documentary about England's crop circles of 2005, & more (www.filmgabriola.com)

JAN 19, 20, 21
Foot Reflexology Introduction commences certificate weekend course. Intro: $10, Course $295. Pacific Institute of Reflexology, (604) 875-8818 (www.pacificreflexology.com)

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JAN 27
Life Between Lives past lives and karma Free talk by Rifa Hodgson, CLBLt. 10am, West Vancouver Memorial Library, 1950 Marine Drive (rifa@lifebetweenlives.ca) 1-888-606-TIME.

JAN 27
World renowned pianists Yaroslav Senyshyn & Alan Kogosowski present Travels with Franz Liszt, 7:30pm, Massey Theatre, New Westminster. Tickets 888-222-6608 (www.ticketweb.ca) $25, $20/seniors & students.

JAN 27-28
"Practical Skills for Blissful Relationships" Couples Workshop. Transformational techniques to be each other's greatest ally in growth and bliss. Couples: $500, Individuals, $295. 604-731-1783/1-888-521-1113. (www.HeartSongSolutions.ca)

JAN 28
Connect With Angels Workshop Angel Card Reader and Magical Manifesting: Learn about Angels and how to give readings. Learn how to manifest abundance and your heart's desires. Register at (www.spiritsay.com) or call 778-388-5477

JAN 28
Gung Haggis Fat Choy: Toddish McWong's Annual Robbie Burns Chinese New Year dinner, Floata Restaurant, 400-180 Keefer St (Chinatown). Reception: 5:30pm. Dinner/show: 6pm. Live music. Tickets Firehall Arts Centre, 604-689-0926.

JAN 28 & 30
"Freedom to Fascism": Must see documentary! January 28: 12:30/2:45pm. January 30: 7:00/9:15pm Pacific Cinematheque, 1131 Howe St. $10/$8, 604-327-9140.

FEB 5-11
Talking Stick Festival: A celebration of contemporary aboriginal performance and art. Tickets $15, $12/seniors & students. Call 604-683-0497. Opening gala features Margo Kane. Visit (www.fullcircle.ca) for daily schedule & information.

FEB 9-11
The World Community Film Festival features over 30 documentary films on social justice, environmental and global issues at Langara College. See (www.codev.org/filmfest) for details.

FEB 12
Global Warming Forum: 7pm, Ridge Theatre, 3131 Arbutus. Free or by donation. Moderator: Erica Johnston, CBC. Speakers include UBC climatologist Philip Austin, SFU economist Mark Jaccard, Graham Kissak of Catalyst Paper, Ian Bruce from the David Suzuki Foundation. Screening of An Inconvenient Truth, 9pm. To guarantee a seat, or to join the event car pool, email (gwforum@telus.net). (www3.telus.net/gwforum)

FEB 16
BC Civil Liberties Association and UBC sponsor Maher Arar at The Chan Centre. Call Sarah 604-687-2919 for tickets and membership information. Sponsored in part by Common Ground.

MAR 2, 3, 4.
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MAR 2-4
The Wellness Show: Vancouver Convention and Exhibition Centre (Canada Place, under the Five Sails), $10 general admission, $8.50/seniors & students, $4/children 6-15, $26 3-day pass. Event information 604-983-2794 (www.thewellnessshow.com).

SATURDAYS

Holistic Healing Fair: Third Saturday of every month. AWAKENING HEART-15177 Russell Ave-White Rock. 10-4pm. Free Admission. 604-535-6603 or (www.emergingpathway.ca).

SUNDAYS

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International Spiritualist Alliance: #201-317 Columbia Street, New West, 604-521-6336. Sunday services, 11am. Rev. Joyce Tarvin, 604-433-6663. See Resource Directory (www.isacanada.ca).

Mountaintop Unity Find a positive New Thought approach to life at Unity! Sundays 10:30am, John Braithwaite Community Centre, 145 W. 1st, North Vancouver. 604-787-1477 (www.unitymountaintop.ca).

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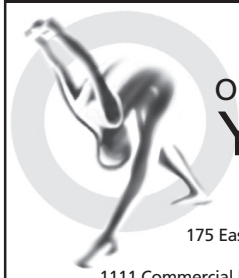

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THURSDAYS

Pranic Healing Clinic: Non-touch energy healing. By donation. West Vancouver United Church, 2062 Esquimalt Ave. Thursdays 10am-2pm. Closed last Thursday of month (www.pranichealing.ca/vancouver).

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Chronic disease cont. from p. 9

If you follow the money, you'll find that those who are gunning for profits – drug, device and insulin manufacturers – will have their own people at the table to ensure the guidelines reflect a treatment paradigm that leads to maximal, instead of rational, consumption of their products. No offence. After all, business is business.

The BC Ministry of Health defines Chronic Disease Management (CDM) as "… an approach to health care that emphasizes helping individuals maintain independence and keep as healthy as possible…" and BC doctors agree with the prime importance of treating diabetes. A September 2001 BC Ministry of Health survey of BC doctors found that diabetes was their top choice as a candidate for CDM.

The key elements of CDM seem somewhat commonsensical: measuring performance, developing physicians' skills, collaborating with other health professionals, creating patient registries and monitoring patient performance. Despite the ministry's talk of strategies to explore "private/public partnerships with the pharmaceutical industry," to fund CDM – as if that's the ticket to solving the sustainability of healthcare problem – how, exactly, does Big Pharma view Chronic Disease Management?

In a nutshell, it's a goldmine. In fact, managed care, and by extension Big Pharma, helped invent CDM. If you look back far enough, you'll find that disease management as a strategy was unveiled, not to a group of doctors, but rather at a meeting of stock market investors. In November 1994, Raymond Gilmartin, then president and CEO of Merck (makers of Vioxx), told a gathering of financial bigwigs at the New York Society of Securities Analysts: "To us, disease management means treating diseases more effectively, primarily by using pharmaceuticals more effectively."

Listen and you can hear the chorus of drug industry shareholders rejoicing.

Disease management was clearly a well-planned, strategic response to demands by health care payers in the US, who, in the early 1990s, needed to rein-in exploding prescription drug costs; the drug industry's response to keep profits growing was to expand methods to increase sales. Pharma's well-funded propaganda, notoriously short on good evidence, promoted the idea that higher drug use would offset other medical costs. The argument was that the more drugs we could put people on, the less those patients would be inhabiting expensive hospital beds, and hence, more savings to the healthcare system.

To increase those sales, the brilliant idea was born that, instead of just pushing drugs, drug companies needed to retool themselves as key players in disease management and convince executives they were really working towards the holistic care of the patient. The first diseases fed to the disease management mill in the mid-1990s were diabetes, asthma and hypertension; today, there are over 100 diseases or conditions treated with some form of disease management. In the US, and by proxy Canada, too, it's a big and growing business. In 1997 in the US, just as the disease management movement was gathering steam, revenues were almost US $80 million. Eight years later in 2005, they had reached $1.2 billion.

Remember what the ministry said about the goals of CDM? "To help individuals maintain independence." Ponder that thought for a while and consider whether disease managers would want to put themselves out of business if they were truly successful in making people "independent." The truth is when you look closely at diabetes treatment protocols and guidelines, they are tooled for greater dependence on drugs, devices and insulins. There's no real attempt to provide good, comparative information about treatment options for patients, or to discuss with them in clear, unbiased language the natural history of diabetes or the likelihood of treatment success, or to advise them of the enormous costs and side effects related to drugs and insulin.

Ironically, the whole process of "disease management" seems to be about turning ordinary people into patients, an essentially disempowering fact of life. Is it possible BC doctors know this, and that's why they've largely rejected the offensive diabetes mongering enshrined in the guidelines?

Few doctors may have the temerity to admit this, but I am sure there are many out there who despair at the sheer futility of the whole venture and find it distasteful to be told to follow a diabetes cookbook to treat their patients. I wonder if they fret about the enormous level of useless drugs and insulin being pushed onto their diabetic patients. Do they fear becoming so lost in the minutiae of blood sugar, they sometimes forget there's a patient attached to those numbers? Do they long for some freedom to go beyond the drugs-testing-insulin paradigm being pushed onto them and their patients?

What should we do when physicians are being pressured by a system to try to improve the percentage of their diabetics that get "good care" when they may fundamentally disagree with what constitutes "good?"

Doctors and patients, you have a story to tell. I'd like to hear from you.

Alan Cassels is co-author of Selling Sickness *and a drug policy researcher at the University of Victoria. He is also the founder of* Media Doctor Canada *(www.mediadoctor.ca), which evaluates reporting of medical treatments in Canada's media.*

Resource Directory

Bodywork 25
Books & Art 25
Business Services 25
Dentistry 25
Education & Certification . . . 26
Events 27
Feng Shui 27
Food 27
Health & Healing 27
Intuitive Arts 28
Nutrition 29
Personal Growth 29
Psychology, Therapy & Counselling 29
Restaurants 30
Vegetarian Restaurants 30
Spiritual Practices 31
Time Out & Rentals 31

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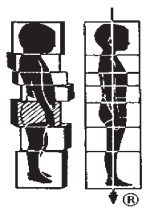

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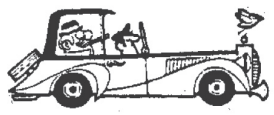

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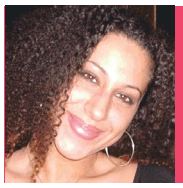

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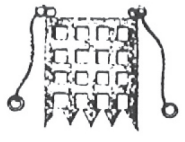

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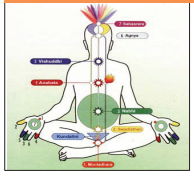

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Forever young and old too soon

Premature adults, perennial youth in the Information Age

by Geoff Olson

Twelve hundred years ago, the philosopher Hesiod had a few things to say about the kids of his time. "I see no hope for the future of our people if they are dependent on frivolous youth of today, for certainly all youth are reckless beyond words... When I was young, we were taught to be discreet and respectful of elders, but the present youth are exceedingly wise [disrespectful] and impatient of restraint."

There's probably never been a time when experts weren't decrying the sorry state of youth. Every decade or two, respectable commentators find some new assault on pink-cheeked innocents: Reefer in the thirties and forties, comic books and rock 'n' roll in the fifties. In the sixties, a whole range of hippie horrors threatened to turn a wide swath of boomer kids into long-haired, sexually promiscuous nihilists. And those were the good kids. The bad ones were already Godless, pot-smoking commies.

In the seventies and beyond, a new suspect entered into the equation. Television was nailed as a scourge of young minds, a perception that was hardly softened by numerous studies that found a correlation between children's exposure to TV viewing and violent behaviour.

It's fairly easy to condemn the boob tube as a one-eyed monster, a plague upon our cable-ready houses, and leave it at that. But instead of cursing the medium we're adrift upon, it's probably more helpful to sit down and figure out which way the wind is blowing. And there is no better guide to our present course than the late Neil Postman.

The question of childhood and information technologies was of great interest to Postman, author of the seminal work *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. I met the media theorist shortly before his death in 2003. In his gravelly Brooklyn accent – he sounded something like a Mel Blanc character – Postman told me the work he was most proud of was *The Disappearance of Childhood* (1982). He felt it had stood the test of time. Reissued in 1992 with a new introduction, the book has indeed held up well.

Now is a good time to take a look back at Postman's most prescient work, a quarter of a century after its publication. The author held that childhood, as it is commonly understood, is disappearing, in large part because parents have lost control of the information environment in which their children are raised. The flip-side is that adults are becoming increasingly juvenilized through mass media. The distinction between generations is collapsing, Postman believed.

Childhood is mostly a social construct, the author insisted. It existed among the ancient Greeks and other civilizations, but it altogether vanished during the Dark Ages. When literacy disappeared, along with education, childhood followed. Children came to be regarded as adults in miniature, an attitude echoed in the medieval paintings where infants look like dour midgets.

"Childhood" returned around the time of the printing press, which is not accidental, according to Postman. With the increased availability of printed texts, growing numbers of professions required literate workers. This requirement set a clearly defined boundary between those with access to adult information and those without. Children had to learn to read to gain this access. Thus, schools were necessary. As society became more complex and interdependent, the onset of adulthood retreated further into the future, bestowed only when one had acquired the mastery of a trade or earned a degree.

The first, fully-articulated viewpoint on childhood as a separate period of life, with its unique problems and needs, was expressed by Rousseau in the 18th century. The high-water mark of childhood came in the late nineteenth to early twentieth century, when children became a class of society in their own right (although mostly without rights) and with their own games and stories.

It's a novel idea that the resurgence in childhood arrived with the printing press and its social spin-offs. Postman drew much of his background material from Philippe Aries' work *Centuries of Childhood* (1962), which has since come under attack from scholars. Yet even if the first part of Postman's thesis is proven to be shaky, the second part has plenty of supporting evidence from the past few decades. In the last half of his book, Postman argued that the distinction between children and adults began to erode with the vast, cross-cultural penetration of another image-based medium, television, which required no schooling to understand.

Television's easy availability has resulted in a near-ubiquitous commodification of adult vices and desires, Postman noted. "One might say that the main difference between an adult and a child is that the adult knows about certain facets of life – its mysteries, its contradictions, its violence, its tragedies – that are not considered for children to know. As children move toward adulthood, we reveal these secrets to them in ways we believe they are prepared to manage. That is why there is such a thing as children's literature."

With its round-the-clock programming, the tube makes this arrangement impossible. "Television requires a constant supply of novel and interesting information to hold its audience," he adds. "This means that all adult secrets – social, sexual, physical and the like – are revealed. Television forces the entire culture to come out of the closet and taps every existing taboo. Incest, divorce, promiscuity, corruption, adultery, sadism – each is now merely a theme for one or another television show. And, of course, in the process, each loses its role as an exclusively adult secret."

Childhood, as it is commonly understood, is disappearing, in large part because parents have lost control of the information environment in which their children are raised. The flip-side is that adults are becoming increasingly juvenilized through mass media. The distinction between generations is collapsing.

The pattern, indicated by the author 25 years ago, is in clear outline now. Every week, the specialty channel Showcase features *Friday Without Borders*, complete with scenes of intercourse on shows celebrating the pornography industry. This is hardly softcore fare, even though the camera coyly pulls away from close-ups of penetration shots. *Family Business*, which stars pornographer "Seymore Butts," presents the porn king and his mom as simply exploring a quirky lifestyle option, with lots of perks for the son.

Considering plenty of kids are up past 10 PM on weekends, and are old enough to handle a remote, you might wonder if we still live in a culture than cares remotely about maintaining adult secrets, or even a moral distinction between the world of children and adults. Of course, sexual content on the tube is still relatively limited. Not so with the unending gunplay and violence of television series. Neither with the rituals of humiliation and comeuppance on shows like *The Apprentice* and *America's Top Model*. Nor with the lifestyle programs equating cosmetic surgery with inner transformation.

For all the media's attention on the dangers to the young from the Internet, it's no surprise we find little contemplation of TV's excesses from within the medium itself. "You won't believe how bad television is going to be in 10 years," said poet Robert Bly in a 2004 interview with writer Michael Ventura. "You're literally going to have to protect your children from it."

Even family-friendly programming sends suspect messages. You only have to turn on the tube during prime time to witness a collapse of generational differences. On family sitcoms, kids are mostly precocious, world-weary founts of wisdom, while adults are presented as well-meaning but hapless buffoons, who are outclassed and outwitted by their fast-talking offspring. It's Indigo Children From Hell. Wouldn't be a bad name for a sitcom, come to think of it.

When broadcasting executives and advertisers are in a lofty frame of mind, they'll say they are only holding up a mirror to society. In a more pragmatic mood, they will say they're simply giving the people what they want. And there is undoubtedly a grain of truth in both claims. With the 13- to 16-year-old set commanding a bigger slice of the consumer economy, advertisers and producers know they can move the most Skittles with a zeitgeist that condescends to the viewing demographic. And there is always the opportunity to use younger viewers as little Trojan horses to raid the parental purse.

Initiative Media Worldwide spends billions of dollars annually, finding placement for its clients' advertising. Its influential *Nag Factor* study was designed not to help parents cope with their children's nagging, but to help corporations formulate their ads so that children would nag for their products more effectively. In the film *The Corporation*, Initiative's grinning vice-president Lucy Hughes sprightly elaborated, "You can manipulate consumers into wanting, and therefore buying your products. It's a game." If childhood is disappearing, why are marketers so interested in flogging products and services to a vanishing demographic? The way I see it, the increased targeting of the young by marketers in no way contradicts Postman; it's entirely consistent with his thesis. The more we think of children in preliterate terms as little adults, the more inclined we are to expose them to forms of manipulation and deceit once limited to older consumers. And it's no surprise that they respond enthusiastically to being rendered as presexualized hotties and embryonic megastars by advertisers and broadcasters.

Videos, DVDs and movies undoubtedly amplify this effect Postman dis-

cussed. The anti-computer author, who refused to get an email account, is on record as being something of a Luddite, almost reflexively so. No doubt Postman would have lumped the Internet in with these other media. Yet the latter's involvement in the process of erasing child/adult distinctions is arguably more complex. Online games and videos push in one direction, blogs and text-based websites in another.

The flip side of Postman's thesis is the increasing juvenilization of adults, a phenomenon that has gone turbo across North America in the past two decades. Twenty-somethings commonly live with their parents into their late twenties, and often have no idea of a life or career direction until well into their thirties. The pop-culture of superheroes and cartoon characters – once the sole preserve of comic books and Saturday morning TV – has expanded into adult film, television, videogames and even literature. Futurists call this "down-aging," when adults nostalgic for their carefree childhood find comfort in pursuits and products from their youth.

The juvenilization of adults runs deeper than abbreviated job opportunities and an economy outsourced overseas.

The juvenilization of adults runs deeper than abbreviated job opportunities and an economy outsourced overseas. Read Postman and you start to see signs of big baby culture everywhere. On six o'clock news shows from Seattle and other urban centres in the US, local anchors talk slowly and deliberately, with the kind of up-tempo, singsong voice used by parents when they want to get their kids' attention. Perhaps broadcasters know something most of us don't about how linguistic patterns are changing. You may have noticed how often people in their twenties and thirties speak with a lilting inflection, with declarative statements rising at the end like interrogatives. This used to be a pattern of speaking limited to children and teenagers.

This social trend has a darkly comic dimension, recorded in recent expressions like "Permayouth," coined for boomers attempting to stop the march of time through cosmetic surgery. Douglas Coupland calls this "Dorian Graying," which he defines as the "… unwillingness to gracefully allow one's body to show signs of aging." But the body can't be fooled; "boomeritis" is the description of injuries to older, amateur athletes who blow their knees playing ultimate frisbee, or otherwise hurting themselves playing something not designed for 40-plus bodies. Kids call snowboarding elders "grays on trays."

As for fashion, there is increasingly less distinction between adult wear and kid's clothing, summed up in the expressions "adultescent" and "babydults." A recent *Vancouver Sun* feature profiled some local, hip parents with teenage interests and fashion sensibilities, who think of their kids as their friends. One suspects these sort of folks are immune to their children's' embarrassment and we all know nothing in the world turns red quite like a teen.

We no longer even find it noteworthy or strange that family members of disparate ages, who share a common enthusiasm for videogames, retreat to separate rooms to lose themselves in violent shoot 'em ups drawn from the same programming code used for military training videos. This sort of thing is no longer shocking or even all that surprising. It's simply part of the background noise in our culture. Like in the science fiction films where pod people replace the town residents, we are in danger of becoming a nation of "adultescents," a one-size-fits-all demographic of narcissistic fashionistas.

Were he to be teleported into our time to view Showcase's *Friday Without Borders*, Hesiod would probably throw up his hands, or just throw up. Neil Postman, who died in 2003, would probably just shrug and ask in his gravelly voice, "What did you expect?" The still active Robert Bly, who recently predicted that parents would have to protect their children from television in 10 years time, would probably apologize for his conservative time estimate.

Yet I suspect that, in spite of all the depredations of the media and the market on their inchoate psyches, it seems children can weather exposure to a wide range of psychic toxins, as long as they are raised with love and a sense of purpose. As for the decline in literacy, we need only witness the Harry Potter phenomenon to see how much children hunger for engaging literature that doesn't talk down to them. Let's also not forget that teenagers have a preternatural talent for detecting and rejecting adult bullshit. Perhaps this will give a future generation some chance in rebuilding a society that currently confuses quiet compliance with critical thinking, empty gestures with principled stands, cynicism for sophistication and marketing with mentoring.

In *The Disappearance of Childhood*, Neil Postman described children as living messages sent to the future. What message are we sending, into what sort of future? Philosophers across the ages have decried how the young lack respect for their elders. Had any of them lived to witness the present world, would they conclude that today's adults have earned it from the youth? I doubt it.

mwiseguise@yahoo.com

Baby steps toward a better world

by Sonya Weir

Occasionally, we can get into some pretty heated discussions at *Common Ground*. Discussions about the state of our province, our country and this planet that we are all privileged to call home. Sometimes it is hard not to feel overwhelmed by the sheer weight of all that seems to be wrong with the way people are going about things. And sometimes, I admit, I find myself on a bit of a rant.

On one of these occasions, when I was articulating rather vehemently about our poor collective performance as humans, our publisher interjected with a question that instantly changed my energy. He simply asked if I had been inspired by anything recently. The question brought me up short and for a moment I was speechless. It was such a startling shift in focus, but in the space between the thinking and the responding I felt a distinct surge of hope. The answer was babies.

I recently attended a baby shower, that beautiful ritual of honouring a mother-to-be. While one expectant mom in particular was being celebrated, there were other women there in various stages of pregnancy. Two other women had bundled up their babies to take part in the happy event, and throughout the day, the young hostess herself juggled a three-month-old son and a two-and-a-half-year-old daughter. To say that the energy in the house was high would be an understatement.

We had all come to honour the mother-to-be and the new life that would soon grace the world. We came bearing gifts and blessings and our unspoken prayers for a safe passage. But it was only when I was asked the question about what had inspired me did I realize that what I had also felt strongly that day was a palpable sense of community, and of hope.

By their mere presence, babies and young children spark community spontaneously, and that day was no exception. The boundaries typically thrown up between strangers seemed to dissolve, replaced with a desire to help. Guests helped prepare the food and decorate the room. A baby cried and someone offered to hold and feed him for a busy mom. And the young woman being honoured at the shower very graciously allowed her tiny niece to "help" her open her gifts.

I left that day with the understanding that I had participated in a microcosm of community that could transform the way we treat each other and our precious planet. Of course that may sound a little naïve, but you could say that hope, in itself, is naïve. Yet where in the world would we be without it?

I also felt slightly chagrined, for I could not help but notice that the dish detergent at the young host couple's home was bio-degradable and that they had Seventh Generation products. I felt like a fake and a hypocrite. I thought about all my rants about what all the "bad" people are doing to the environment and I had no choice but to recognize that I am part of the problem. I don't always buy products that are good for the environment. And here was a young couple with a baby, a young daughter *and* a dog, and they had managed to make it a priority.

We are none of us an island, separate from the actions of our neighbours, regardless of whether they live next door or across the world. The sooner we eliminate that vague and ubiquitous "they" from our vocabularies, the sooner we can come to terms with the reality that we belittle ourselves and others by pointing the finger, and that we are all in this together. There is no "they" to blame out there for all the ills of the world. There is only a whole lot of "us."

I have attended many workshops, seminars and talks over the years, all designed to be inspiring. What struck me that afternoon at the baby shower was how inspired I felt in witnessing so much unabashed hope under one roof. We talk a lot about the next seven generations, and how the actions we take today impact the children to come. Well, they were present that day, the unborn and the newly born and the young girl who made a little bed for her doll in the middle of the living room.

My heart opened at that shower, both to myself and to the others I have judged for their actions. I came away with a renewed awareness of some simple truths I had forgotten in the course of my busy life: I learn best by example, children are amazing teachers and hope can come in a very small package.

Maher Arar cont. from p. 5

Justice O'Connor will also make further recommendations in a second report before the end of the year [December 12, 2006]. This second report will outline proposals for a new approach to reviewing the RCMP's activities regarding national security investigations. It is my view and my hope, based on testimony at the inquiry, that this should go beyond the RCMP and include at least CSIS and Foreign Affairs.

It is important to make a distinction between "review" and "oversight." Oversight will be more effective as it will prevent tragedies from happening again while review means that tragedy has happened already and an investigation needs to be launched to find out what went wrong.

Here's a good example to illustrate the point: The existence of an oversight agency could have prevented the RCMP from sending false information about me to their American counterparts or, at a minimum, could have made a huge difference when it came to correcting the record early on. Quick hearings could have been held, at the end of which all Canadian agencies could have been ordered to issue a "one voice" letter clearing me of any wrongdoing. Certainly this could have resulted in my being released earlier and also could have served as a deterrent to those Canadian officials who embarked on the damaging smear campaign after my return to Canada.

I hope that many lessons have been learned from my case. Canadians have invested time, effort and money in this inquiry. Now is the time to make sure this investment pays off, by insisting that the government implements all of Justice O'Connor's recommendations. Doing so will help Canada restore its tarnished reputation for promoting and protecting human rights around the globe.

I draw my strength [in part] from the support and generosity I have received from Canadians. I have rediscovered Canada through its people, people who made me feel proud of being Canadian.

This article is from Maher Arar's official website www.maherarar.ca. Our intent is to spread his message to a wider audience. Visit his website for more info. The day we were going to press Prime Minister Harper issued a formal apology and announced that the government would pay Arar $12.5 million compensation, $2 million for lawyers fees and $10.5 million for pain and suffering. Also visit www.amnesty.org and www.bccla.org.

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On Track Zodiac

FEBRUARY 2007 *Ilona Hedi Granik*

ARIES (Mar 21 – Apr 19)
Planetary fellowship has its reign in the fire signs and you feel exceptionally balanced. Romance may not be high on your list of things to accomplish as you seek to guide your life toward purpose and actualization of your goals.

TAURUS (Apr 20 – May 21)
Joining forces with others will help build your source of wealth within a community setting. Global consciousness will serve both your needs and the needs of others. You may want to risk more and communicate wisely when it comes to finances. Continue on the path of self-achievement and charity.

GEMINI (May 22 – Jun 20)
Your need for a quickening will outweigh the lackluster events of the recent past. Any dealings with high finance will be hot, hot, hot. Hidden and unscrupulous types could tempt you, but you have developed an integrity that you bring to all your associations.

CANCER (Jun 21 – Jul 22)
Your inner warriors and sages clash and become uprooted as many friendships go through breaks and changes. A major reworking of your relationships will afford you a new self-expression, shaking loose anyone who doesn't follow your spiritual path.

LEO (Jul 23 – Aug 22)
As if it weren't enough to have Saturn in your sign, you now have to contend with a glaring reality in your personal domain. Intense emotions will have you delving into a host of deep and challenging lessons. Cross your paws and hope to joy that you live life on the edge with all the rest of the wild creatures, in the light of the full moon.

VIRGO (Aug 23 – Sep 22)
You will want to explore your creative, hidden talents and rich spiritual life. You have reconciled with your past over these last few months and a new era of personal power and responsibility is upon you. This is a period of stability where both hidden and obvious energies assist your metamorphosis.

LIBRA (Sep 23 – Oct 22)
Each day brings with it a new grasp of reality. As you dream of travel destinations and stronger relationships, you may find it all becoming more real. You will also sense a new lightness and gaiety to your moods. Your intuition flies high.

SCORPIO (Oct 23 – Nov 21)
The dreamy Scorpio native rests her head on luxurious pillows of velvet and satin. Hopes and desires are high, but you can't force the powers that be to bend to your will. More patience is needed so make yourself more comfortable while you ride the crashing waves.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov 22 - Dec 21)
The wanderlust that is your usual inner drive desires a time out. You may find it difficult to be comfortable with some circumstances that keep you in one place for too long; such is the alchemy of balancing travel plans with the need to stay at home. Try not to burn the candle at both ends.

CAPRICORN (Dec 22 - Jan 19)
You could feel that you are at the crossroads of your life and you would be correct. Life decisions take on an air of cardinal significance as you plot out some financial directions. Any usual, daily shortcuts will not substantiate your grand schemes.

AQUARIUS (Jan 20 – Feb 19)
You may find yourself wanting to cross-examine many things. Thoughts about the future may strike deep discord within. You could feel as if you don't know what a *bona fide* certainty is, perhaps believing that the universe is not advancing your pleas for insight. Clarity comes with the promise of spring.

PISCES (Feb 20 – Mar 20)
As Jupiter bestows fortunes on career themes, Uranus will continue to crack the foundation of the old self. Much activity comes your way mid-year within the home and in your career, perhaps in opposing ways. A mixture of expansion and breaking old habits awaits you.

Ilona Hedi Granik is a clairvoyant consultant and author with 32 years of experience in astrology, multi-media art and healing. (iamilona@gmail.com) (www.HeartLightCentre.com).

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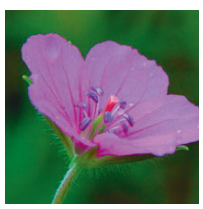

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